Final Report

MUSIC THROUGH BRAILLE

By

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1. Purpose

This pilot project was intended for up to six visually handicapped children attending mainstream schools in the Province. The pre-requisites for selection of the children were good literary braille skills, average to high intelligence and probable age range from 11-17 years. The intention was to teach the students fluent use of braille music notation and enable them to read music, take part in school music activities and develop sufficient proficiency for private study on equal terms with their peers.

Since mainstreaming takes place throughout the continent, this project will be of wide-spread importance to blind children and their teachers. As part of the project, the materials produced and knowledge gained from the work will be made available to everyone who would like to take advantage of them.

2. Support and Funding

The initial financial impetus for the Music Through Braille Program was given by the C.N.I.B. in the form of an extremely generous grant of $26,000.00. This was closely followed by a pledge of up to $10,000.00 in services by Alberta College. The Downtown Kiwanis Club donated a further $5,000.00 and the Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired contributed $1,500.00 toward student maintenance during the course, itself.

The final commitment of $20,000.00 from Alberta Education, Planning Services, means that the follow-up activities necessary to make the program useable in subsequent years can be accomplished.

3. **Course Materials and Facilities**

Instructors for the Music Through Braille course were Anne Burrows, who had co-authored the course, and Theresa Mrochuk, a young blind musician who studies both piano and voice. Administration of the program was carried out by Avaleigh Crockett, Assistant Director of Alberta College Music Centre, and Gaylene Sangster, Administrative Assistant in the Music Centre.

The actual text/workbook used for the Music Through Braille class was written by Anne Burrows and Bettye Krolick in the 10 months prior to the course. The printing of written and braille copies of the text would not have been possible without the assistance of a computer program, written by Robert Step of the University of Illinois, which enables a regular computer keyboard to be used to input braille signs. The text was input on a mini-computer by Bettye Krolick, who then sent the diskettes to Edmonton. Braille copies of the textbook were made by the Material Resource Centre in Calgary. A browsing library of braille music scores to be used as supplementary material during the course was compiled

with the assistance of Margaret Mattheson, Librarian, C.N.I.B. National Headquarters. Students provided their own braille writing equipment, but blank paper was supplied for them. At the completion of the course, each student took home a book of braille music to continue the work begun in class. Since the completion of the course, a small dictionary of Braille Music Signs has been distributed to the students, courtesy of Margaret Butow of the Hadley School for the Blind in Winetka, Illinois.

Facilities were provided by Alberta College, and consisted of a classroom with six desks and a piano, a library with a piano, a teaching studio and the staff lounge. The library, studio and lounge were used when students were receiving special coaching from Anne Burrows or Theresa Mrochuk, and when students were assisting each other or working individually. Lunch was provided by Alberta College each day that the course was in session.

4. **Students**

Students were chosen in consultation with C.N.I.B. and with schools in Calgary, Sylvan Lake and Edmonton. The students who attended the course were as follows:

Geoffrey Connor, age 11	Edmonton
Cindy Courterielle, age 11	Edmonton

Marco Miggotti, age 19	Calgary
Larry Rinke, age 25	Calgary
Craig West, age 11	Sylvan Lake
Sherri-Lynne Wiebe, age 17	Calgary

5. **Program Description**

The course took place at Alberta College in Edmonton from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. on weekdays from July 3 until July 27, 1984. The students spent from 9:00 until 12:00 receiving instructions from Anne Burrows and/or Theresa Mrochuk as a class or individually, depending upon each student's needs at any given time. Provision was made for each student to progress at his or her own rate and level. Students were brought to Alberta College and returned to their homes each day by taxi following their lunch break.

The daily lessons were based on the text written by Anne Burrows and Bettye Krolick. This book introduces braille music signs in as logical an order as possible, and contains written examples of music in braille notation, as well as a section of supplementary examples. The text, itself, was supplemented in many ways with both oral and written exercises, sight singing, round singing and music dictation. Most of these exercises and activities were generated spontaneously through

questions and the ensuing discussions. In addition, students were introduced to basic conducting techniques and concepts such as the circle of fifths and the resulting generation of keys and scales. Since Music Through Braille was being held at the same time as student Band and Orchestra Workshops at Alberta College, we were able to further supplement the musical experience of our students. Student and professional players on both string and wind instruments visited the Music Through Braille classroom and performed for the students, who were also able to examine each instrument and determine the various sizes, shapes and methods of playing. Our students were also able to attend rehearsals and concerts given by the Band and Orchestra Workshops.

6. **Extra-Curricular Activities**

Since four of the students in the class were from out of town and were being billeted, considerable effort was made to arrange social activites for the class. Provision was made for any or all of our students to participate in a Teen Activities program offered by C.N.I.B. and A.S.R.A.B. In addition to this, many volunteers made a wide variety of activities available to the class. These activities included a visit to the C.B.C. recording studios, a trip to the top of the A.G.T. Tower with its telelphone museum, barbeque dinners,

a farm visit, a trip to West Edmonton Mall, a camping weekend and a swimming party.

The students were particularly excited at being visited by television journalists and camermen. Both C.F.R.N. and C.B.C. news crews spent time interviewing and taking pictures of our activities, and both stations had evening news coverage on Music Through Braille. Since so many people had contributed time and effort to the Music Through Braille course, a Thank You Breakfast was held during the last week of July, and all those who had participated were invited to attend. The Edmonton Journal was in attendance and subsequently published an article about our students and about the class in general.

7. Outcomes and Conclusions

The Music Through Braille course will have important future results for the students, but its influence was apparent even before the course had ended. As a result of the association with other class members and teachers, and the many and varied activities, the students showed a considerable increase in knowledge and experience, both socially and with respect to the fact of their blindness. For most of them, it was their first exposure to being taught by blind teachers, who were able to

offer them much more than the musical skills at the heart of the course. They learned the basics of music reading, but they also discovered that they can now look forward to an infinite number of musical experiences which were not available to them before. Through the use of countless musical examples from every period and style of music, their attitudes toward music were enlarged. The "anti classical" attitude which most of them brought to the course nearly disappeared with their discovery that they could find enjoyment in music they had never before considered worthwhile. The instructors were extremely gratified to find that during the third week of the course, two students who had previously had little or no knowledge of the piano were able to memorize a simple Mozart piano piece from the braille text.

8. Follow-up

In the light of class experience, the course materials have been revised. In order to simplify the assimilation of new information, the sequence of presentation has been changed somewhat. Since we also found that the original rate of progression was too rapid for young students with no previous experience, supplementary

exercises have been added to reinforce each concept and to give the student practical experience with new material. Finally, a supplement containing all signs used for violin, guitar, etc. will be added to complete the text.

The Teacher's Manual will include a preface to help any reader understand its use, and will consist of the revised text and suggestions for amplifying the material where desirable. Most of the suggested amplification is in the form of dictation exercises which may be taken from the literature, or may be actual instrumental or vocal parts being used by the student in lessons or ensembles. Musical information concerning basic theory, but not connected to the actual braille signs, was not included in the textbook because it would have been too cumbersome. The Teacher's Manual will indicate where these components could best be included. The Manual is being designed for use in both classroom and private instruction, by both sighted and blind instructors.

A great deal of interest in the Music Through Braille program has already been expressed in the United States

and elsewhere in Canada. Publication activities have yet to be undertaken, but are obviously a very crucial final step in making our material widely available. With publication, we hope that Music Through Braille will enable many young blind people to become musically literate.